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Nikolai Marr's Critique of Indo-European Philology and the Subaltern Critique of Brahman Nationalism in Colonial India.

After a long period during which his works were regarded as little more than a cautionary tale about the usurpation of science by ideology, the controversial Georgian philologist and archaeologist Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr has made an unexpected reappearance on the intellectual scene. During the period after Stalin's denunciation of Marrism in June 1950, Marr's polemical attacks on Indo-European philology were almost universally derided, while his adversaries were often presented as exemplars of the scientific approach he undermined. Both the rise and fall of Marrism were related to Stalinism though, interestingly, the veracity of Stalin's attack was never seriously questioned. In recent years, however, a series of studies outlining the entanglement of Indo-European philology with colonialism has led to a reassessment of the very ideas against which Marr polemicized (inter alia Olender 1992; Arvidsson 2006; Benes 2008; McGetchin 2009), while reconsideration of the nature of Russian imperialism and oriental studies has necessitated a revaluation of Marr's problematic legacy.

Meanwhile, the rise of Hindu nationalism in India has revealed the enduring ideological power of the Aryan-Semite dichotomy, rooted in Indo-European philology, beyond the boundaries of Europe. The Indian critiques of 'Indo-Europeanism' that were broadly contemporary with that of Marr become significant in this regard but, to my knowledge, they have not yet been considered alongside Marr's work. The current article seeks to address this gap in research and to examine Marr's work in the light of the work of two leading lower-caste critics of Indo-European philology and its reception among brahman intellectuals in India: the Maharashtrian activist, thinker, and anti-caste social reformer Jyotirao Phule (1928–1890) and critic of the caste system and of the ideology of Hindu nationalism Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar (1892–1956). This consideration raises a number of important issues about the reception of hegemonic ideas in different intellectual environments and so has many implications for cultural theory more broadly.

Reconsidering Marr in the light of Postcolonial Studies

Renewed interest in Marr's work has coincided with a questioning of the Foucauldian narratives that have dominated postcolonial theory since the 1980s. Broadly speaking, this involves challenging an understanding of 'colonial discourse' as a closed system of power/knowledge dating back to the Enlightenment and beyond, in which the dichotomy of East and West has remained a structuring principle of domination. It is significant that questioning of this narrative was already present in the work of Edward Said (1983; Brennan 2006), whose eclectic 1978 study Orientalism is widely held to have launched the boom in postcolonial theory. The Foucauldian narrative, bolstered by the boom in postmodern theory, nevertheless became what philosopher of science Thomas Khun (1970) called 'normal science' in the humanities, an accepted paradigm passed down to the next generation of scholars, who engage primarily in 'problem solving' rather than generating novelties, either conceptual or phenomenal.

The decline and fall of the USSR had led many thinkers seeking to undermine the ideological hold of Eurocentrism on the humanities to present the USSR as but a

variant of the European imperial project and Marxism, official ideology of that state, to be but a variety, or even the epitome, of European 'Enlightenment thinking' (Kemper 2006: 6). Matters turned out to be much more complex, however. Not only was this image of the Enlightenment as a relentless monologue subject to severe critique (see, in particular, Israel 2006), but the allegedly consistent Eurocentrism of Marx was revealed to be a myth based on a failure to engage with his complex and developing oeuvre (see Habib 2006; Anderson 2010; Achcar 2013). Moreover, as Bryan S. Turner noted in a book published the same year as Said's Orientalism, 'there is no such thing as a homogenous tradition of Marxist analysis' about the Orient, or indeed about many other matters (1978, 8).[1] One might here recall Said's discomfort with Foucault's assumption that 'the individual text or author counts for very little', and the former's insistence that 'individual writers' do leave a 'determining imprint' on an 'otherwise anonymous body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism' (Said 2003 [1978], 23). Rather than a closed circle of discourse, what needs to be foregrounded is the 'dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the… great empires' (Said 2003 [1978], 14–15). The vortex of the Russian revolution and its aftermath is a particularly glaring example of why this foregrounding is necessary.

The Russian Empire was certainly one of the 'great empires' of the modern era, and its disintegration in 1917 and, arguably, its reconstitution in the 1930s, is a crucial problem scarcely touched upon by Said and mainstream postcolonial theory. Recently, however, some important research has questioned the extent to which the Eurasian Russian Empire can simply be viewed as a variant of European colonialism and the extent to which the ideological forms or discursive binaries outlined by Said actually apply in the Russian case. In some cases it appears the orientalist binaries do actually have some traction, but there are important areas where they do not. This is especially the case in relation to late imperial Oriental Studies, and it is the work of Marr that is the most extreme example of where this does not fit. Some Russian academics specializing in Oriental Studies saw their work as serving the Russian imperial project, but were fundamentally opposed to the orientalist binaries of the rational, dynamic West and the religious and stagnant East.

For these thinkers Russia was a civic space in which different cultures interacted to form a hybrid, pan-Russian identity. As Gerasimov, Glebov and Mogilner (2016) show, this idea of hybridity became quite widespread in the late imperial period as a way of describing rather than undermining the imperial situation. The great historian of Central Asia Vasilii Bartol′d articulated the position most systematically, arguing the 'historical mission of Russia' was 'to be the intermediary in the overland trade and cultural intercourse between Europe and Asia' (Bartol′d 1963b [1927], 432). While he did not rule out the use of force to achieve this, 'peaceful convergence' of the peoples of the East with Russia was held to be the true imperial mission. This he based on a positivist narrative in which universal cultural evolution leads to the increasing integration of peoples whose uneven levels of development is the result of contingent rather than essential factors. The incorporation of those with a 'lower' level of culture into a state where a 'higher' level of culture predominated would be advantageous for all concerned. Oriental Studies played a crucial role here, for revealing the achievements of subject peoples and promoting pride in their local

[1] See also Banaji 2010; Kaiwar 2014; Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015.

languages and cultures would further the cause of 'convergence' (sblizhenie) and 'merger' (sliianie). Bartol′d argued that the imperial state should support Oriental Studies because to do so would bolster the hegemony of the imperial state: 'the peoples of the east will believe in the superiority of our culture all the more when they are convinced we know them better than they know themselves' (1963a [1900]: 610).

Marr who, like Bartol′d, was a student of Baron Viktor Rozen, and shared his teacher's imperative to study 'Russia's own Orient' (Tolz 2011), concurred with this benevolent view of Russian imperialism. Marr was particularly hostile to European scholars' attempts to encroach onto the study of the 'Russian Orient', not least his own area of specialism, the Caucasus region. He was incensed by the ways in which Indo-European philologists viewed the Caucasus as the original homeland of the Indo-European peoples, marginalizing the indigenous languages and cultures, and subordinating them to the narrative of European superiority, which by the 1880s was taking increasingly racist forms.[2] German scholars' incursions into the Caucasus during World War One were seen as a conceptual attempt to annex the region accompanying the military offensive that was proving disastrous for the Russian state (Tolz 2011, 91). In many respects Marr's growing hostility to Indo-European philology, and his increasingly assertive attempts to root out traces of the paradigm in Russian and later Soviet scholarship, was treating such ideas as a Trojan horse in the public sphere, and its advocates a fifth column. This would help make Marr's ideas useful to the Stalin regime in the 1930s.

Unlike the nationalist and socialist intellectuals who laid the foundations of Soviet ethnology while political exiles in Siberia,[3] Marr was politically quite conservative, supporting the Russian imperial project as defined above while opposing nationalist and separatist currents. The problem was that neither the autocratic state nor the weak Russian bourgeoisie was interested in pursuing the multicultural project and instead imposed a type of rule which sought to marginalize subject languages and cultures and replace them with the general forms of Empire. Marr, like other specialists in the field, thought this a counterproductive policy because it encouraged the growth of separatist nationalisms. Stalin's development of a nationality policy based on korenizatsiia (indigenization), the promotion of national cultures and cadre within a common civic space, in the mid 1920s did, however, provide an opportunity to pursue such objectives, and Marr was among those who participated enthusiastically.[4]

Marr's opposition to Indo-European philology went back at least to the turn of the century, and his early work was concerned with illustrating the connections between Caucasian folk narratives with the folklore of the Semitic peoples. This work, for which Marr was awarded a Gold Medal by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, inserted the cultures of the Caucasus into the cultural milieu that was the

[2] Benes (2008, p. 287) goes so far as to claim that linguistic research was 'dominated in Germany by the various national pathologies of their völkisch-organicist rhetoric through the first half of the twentieth century'.

[3] These included the Polish nationalists Wacław Sieroszewski (1858–1945) and Bronisław Piłsudski (1866–1918) and the Jewish activist-ethnographers Vladimir Jochelson (1855–1937), Vladimir Tan-Bogoraz (1865–1936) and Lev Shternberg (1861–1927).

[4] Interestingly, cultural convergence as the basis of the formation of national identity was a central plank of the first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru's (1889–1964) conception of the formation of the Indian nation state (Seth 1995, 200–204). Nehru most likely acquired this perspective from the USSR.

‘other’ of the Indo-European or Indo-Aryan peoples privileged by the dominant trends in European philology. While the connections he drew were in many respects novel and convincing, Marr quickly went on to extend his work to argue that Kartvelian languages were, at a fundamental level, related to Semitic languages. This controversial thesis, which was much less widely accepted than his earlier work, subsequently developed into the thesis that Kartvelian languages were not typical of some cultural backwater, but part of a Japhetic family of languages that were related to Semitic languages by virtue of a common ‘Noetic’ ancestor. This ‘Mosaic ethnology’ was a conceptual foundation Marr shared with Indo-European philologists (Trautmann 1997, 28–61) and, at least initially, Marr shared their tendency to conflate race and language. Later, however, he radically counterposed racial and cultural factors. Marr’s employment of Mosaic ethnology ran in an opposite direction to that of the Indo-Europeanists, and in the wake of the Russian Revolution he rather opportunistically began to give his ideas an anti-imperialist gloss. Thus, ‘from the Caucasus to Asia Minor to the Iberian peninsula’, Marr argued, there was once a single Japhetic people, the ‘Japhetites’, which was broken up by the Indo-European invasion. This led to the formation of mixed, hybridized forms of language such as Armenian, in which the ‘princely’ [kniazheskii] Indo-Aryan language subdued the demotic [prostonarodnyi] Japhetic language.

The languages of Europe that proved anomalous to the Indo-European narrative, such as Georgian, Basque and Etruscan, were survivals of this earlier formation, while all the languages of Europe bore traces of mixture. Far from being dynamic and culturally superior Aryans, as portrayed in the work of influential philologists, the most influential propagandist among whom was Max Müller, the Aryans were, in Marr’s account, rapacious imperialists who expropriated the Japhetites both economically and culturally, while creating myths about their inherent nobility. The ‘foundations of modern civilization’ were in reality derived from ‘the Japhetic literary milieu [*pis'mennaia sreda*]’, and it was through hybridization with the Japhetites that ‘the Indo-European race’ had acquired ‘cultural nobility’. The achievements of the Greeks, Romans and thus the foundations of European culture were in reality the plundered cultural heritage of the Japhetites (Marr 1933 [1923], 177).

‘Indo-Europeanism’ was, for Marr, very close to being an example of the Foucauldian idea of a discourse of power/knowledge. Scholars in European academic institutions developed the discourse to legitimize and advance European colonialism. Philology masquerades as science, especially when it takes the form of apparently objective forms of phonetic analysis, but it remains rooted in myth. Seeking to give his critique a resonance for the new Soviet regime, whose institutional support he was successfully courting, Marr characterized ‘Indo-Europeanism’ as ‘flesh and bone the expression of moribund bourgeois sociality’ that had been ‘built on the oppression of the peoples of the East by the murderous colonial policies of European nations’ (Marr 1934 [1924], 1).

The hegemony of the colonial powers affected the intellectuals of the colonized, however. Seeking to advance national cultures nationalist intellectuals appropriated the methodological assumptions of ‘Indo-Europeanism’, claiming the historical legitimacy of their own nations with reference to their derivation from ancient ethnological, linguistic and cultural groups. The development of the ‘Finnish folklore method’, which sought to trace the origins of the Finno-Ugric myths collected as the

Kalevala, was one such example, while the emergence of 'Caucasology', based on the comparative method developed by Indo-European linguists, among Georgian intellectuals particularly alarmed Marr (Cherchi and Manning 2002). Marr's 'Japhetidology' aimed to challenge the ideology behind linguistic and disciplinary boundaries.

In 1923, partly as a reaction against the hostile, and sometimes anti-Semitic, response his theories encountered among German philologists, Marr finally broke with comparative linguistics and launched the so-called 'New Theory of Language'. He now attempted to construct an extravagant theoretical edifice to counter the entire discourse of Indo-Europeanism, including the identity of a single language and a single people and the thesis that all languages derived from distinct protolanguages. All languages now passed through a 'single glottogonic process' from plural origins, rooted in gestures and labour cries, and leading towards a single world language qualitatively different from those that currently exist. If 'Indo-Europeanism' was founded on Mosaic ethnology and the rationality of Western imperialism, then the New Theory was founded on the positivist narrative of 'the gradual convergence of an ever greater number of separate societies' (Bartol′d 1977 [1911], 208) that underlay his and his colleagues' understanding of Russian imperialism. As Lawrence Thomas (1957, 143) puts it in still valuable study of Marr's work, immanent factors of linguistic development were replaced by environmental ones, through which language, as an organism, 'begins as a multitude of "mollusc-like embryo languages" and… develops by "crossing," '"hybridization" and "mutation," in a constantly upward direction until a perfect, single language will be achieved'. The result was a counter-myth that suited the ideological needs of the emerging Soviet state in its struggle with hostile powers. With the help of number of sympathetic philosophers and historians, particularly the historian Sergei Kovalev (Marr 1936 [1927], 114–118), Marr gave this idea a Marxist-sounding gloss by linking the stages in the development of language to stages in the development of the forces and relations of production. In 1927 Marr began presenting his theory as Marxism in linguistics, but just two years before he had confided in a colleague that 'Japhetic Linguistics . . . is not Marxism any more than it is a theory, and if it contains principles which confirm the Marxist doctrine, so much the better for it (that is, the doctrine), in my opinion, and so much the worse for its opponents' (quoted in Matthews [1950] 17).

Colonial assimilation of 'Indo-Europeanism'

Marr's concern about the influence of 'Indo-Europeanism' in Russia and the USSR more generally was not entirely without foundation. The dangers of great-Russian chauvinism were repeatedly raised by Lenin and others in the immediate post-revolutionary situation, and Russian, an Indo-European language, needed to yield its dominance to the many other languages of the national minorities under the early Bolshevik nationality policy. Some intellectuals within Russia, and in the émigré community saw the decline of Russian power within the former Empire as cultural degeneration. While linked to the ideology of imperial powers competing with Russia, the Indo-European paradigm could become the tool of culturally dominant or aspirant groups within the USSR to establish their own dominance. This had certainly been the case in India, where privileged brahman intellectuals had seized on key aspects of the work of European philologists to consolidate their own positions and then present the ideology as one of national liberation.

While Marr wrote little specifically on India, his model of the subordination of the Japhetites by Aryans and the forms of linguistic subordination than resulted was modeled on what Thomas Trautmann (2005, 99–100) calls the racial account of Indian history according to which 'Indian civilization was formed by a big bang, caused by the conquest of light-skinned, Aryan, civilized invaders over dark-skinned savage aboriginal Indians, and the formation of the caste system which bound the two in a single society, at once mixed and segregated'. Marr's interest in 'dissident' forms of Indology is clear from his joining with his colleagues Sergei Ol′denburg and Fedor Shcherbatskoi to champion the candidature of French Indologist Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935) to become a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1919 (Ol′denburg, Marr and Shcherbatskoi 1919). In 1927 he published an article subjecting Indian place names to semantic-palaeontological analysis, aiming to reveal pre-Aryan linguistic and cultural substrata. In support of his project he adduced the work of Lévi, who he commended for 'bravely' pointing out that:

> India has been too exclusively examined from the Indo-European standpoint. It ought to be remembered that India is a great maritime country, open to a vast sea forming so exactly its Mediterranean, a Mediterranean of proportionate dimensions which for a long time was believed to be closed in the south. The movement which carried the Indian colonization towards the Far East, probably about the beginning of the Christian Era, was far from inaugurating a new route, as Columbus did in navigating towards the West. Adventurers, traffickers and missionaries, profited by the technical progress of navigation and followed, under the best conditions of comfort and efficiency, the way traced from time immemorial, by the mariners of another race, whom the Aryan or Aryanised India despised as savages. (Lévi 1929 [1923], 125-6; cited in Marr 1927, 224-5).

While Marr sought to assimilate Lévi's findings into his own expansive theoretical perspective, this longue durée vision of Indian cultural influence appealed to Russian Indologists, who collaborated with Lévi and sought to trace the connections between Buddhist communities in Russia and India. Lévi's work also found a significant following in India, culminating in the formation of the Greater India Society in Calcutta by two of Lévi's doctoral students, Kalidas Nag (1888–1980) and P. C. Bagchi (1898–1956), in 1926. As Stolte and Fishche-Tyné (2012, 84) note, Lévi's presentation of India as 'not only a highly developed civilization long before its contact with Europe, but also a hegemon and civilizational force in Asia, supplied valuable ammunition to the anti-colonial struggle for freedom'. The political legacy proved to be ambiguous, however, since on the one hand it was a resource for those criticizing the colonial regime and the legitimacy of the caste system, but it equally it could legitimize ideologies of Hindu supremacy.

Lévi provided a counterweight to British orientalism, which constructed its image of the Aryan past almost exclusively through brahmanical texts, while neglecting non-canonical Buddhist writings and other archaeological material that could have problematised the image presented in those texts. British orientalism 'revealed' upper-caste Aryans, the bearers of Sanskrit and the Vedas, to be cousins of the British in distinction to the lower-caste non-Aryans and Dravidians. Mani continues, '[t]he Orientalists and their Indian mimics saw Indian civilisation as derivative from Aryan

civilisation, and the caste system was applauded as a means by which people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds were brought together and subjected to the "civilizing" influence of the Aryans'. Hinduism underwent what Rybakov (1981) calls a 'bourgeois reformation' as upper caste intellectuals brought their knowledge of Sanskrit texts, access to which had long been denied to lower castes, into the reform movements, 'propelled by the need to acquire qualifications for various jobs under the colonial government as well as to retain their hegemony in the changing socio-economic scenario' (Mani 2005, 199). Modern western ideas were adopted, and then through a process of what Figueira (2015, 95) calls '[c]anonical gerrymandering and free translation techniques' of Sanskrit texts, proclaimed to be part of Hindu tradition. Such techniques allowed 'Father of the Bengal Renaissance', Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), for instance, to 'prove', inter alia, that widow immolation, Sati, had no basis in scripture, and to deploy these in a campaign for the British to ban the practice, which was eventually achieved in 1829. It was, in fact, upper-caste, property-owning women whose sexuality was fiercely guarded and who were affected by these patriarchal practices, with lower-caste women much more likely to remarry. Sati, enforced widowhood and the like represented an obstacle to the progress of the upper castes. Roy also argued that embedded in the Vedas was a monotheistic urreligion that placed Hinduism on a par with Christianity, challenging both the Hindu priesthood and Christian missionaries.

Indo-European scholarship provided the basis from which Brahmin reformers created a utopian image of the splendid, ancient Aryan civilization governed by the true religion, where enlightenment and freedom was maximized. It also provided an explanation of its subsequent decline. Reformer Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901) argued degeneration of the Indian branch of the Indo-European tribe from this splendor occurred because Aryan settlers were 'overwhelmed by the influences of the earlier Dravidian dominion' (1902 [1899], 230). Early attempts to revive the culture were, he argued, thwarted by Jains and Buddhists, who encouraged idolatry through the worship of their saints. This, in turn, 'got mixed up with the fetish-worship of the aboriginal tribes, who were received into the Aryan fold, and their gods were turned into incarnations of the Aryan deities' (1902 [1895], 221). Subsequently 'conquest by the Mahomedans' from the north weakened the Aryan heritage further 'by the actual conversion to the Mahomedan faith of one-fifth of the population, and by the imperceptible but permanent moulding of the rest of the people in the ways of thought and belief' (1902 [1899], 230). According to Ranade (1902 [1885], 101) the British provided India with 'a living example… of how Aryan customs, unaffected by barbarous laws and patriarchal notions, resemble our own ancient usages' and this enabled the restoration of 'the old healthy practices'.

In this way even the most progressive, reform-minded brahman intellectuals found, in the work of Indo-Europeanists, material to justify their own continuing dominance of the region, while leaving the lower castes in their place and 'othering' the Muslims according to the terms of the Aryan-Semite dichotomy. As Indo-Europeanism took on an increasingly racist form in Europe, and a wave of nationalism began spreading through British India, so in the second phase of 'reformation', the upper-caste reforming intellectuals focused less on the opposition between the old and new than on that between 'ours' and 'theirs' (Rybakov 1982, 124-5) that identified Indian 'national culture'. Hinduism was thereby differentiated both from Muslim and European cultures. Thus Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) followed Boston

University President and professor of systematic theology William F. Warren (1885) to argue that Aryans had originated in the arctic, and that only the Asiatic Aryans had maintained their original civilization, albeit in a degraded form (Tilak 1903). Later, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (1906-1973), the second supreme leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sanghone (RSS), and of the architects of the Hindutva ideology, sought to uphold Tilak's idea while maintaining that Aryans were native to India by arguing that in those days the North Pole was located in present day Bihar and Orissa (Thapar 2008 [1999], 75). Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) drew up a physiognomy of the Aryan (Figueria 2015, 135) before arguing that the technological, practical and organizational skills of the West desperately needed the spirituality of the Aryan God revealed in the Vedas and retained, albeit in distorted forms, in Hinduism as opposed to the 'terrible' Semitic God who was a mere 'thunderer' (cited in Figueira 2015, 133). Vivekananda toured the United States, Europe and the UK on a mission to re-Aryanize a spiritually degenerated people long deprived of Vedic, Aryan and upper-caste wisdom. Finally, Gandhi argued against British dominion over India on the basis that one group of Aryans should not dominate another (Mani 2005, 192–193), while common cause with black Africans was proclaimed impossible (Desai and Dahed 2015).[5]

Counter-history and anti-myth

Against this background the hostility of Marr, a philologist from a marginalized and long colonized region, towards the Indo-European paradigm and the danger of its assimilation by nationalists in the wake of the collapse of the Russian Empire, is quite understandable. In fact Marr's Japhetic counter-history shares a remarkable number of similarities with that developed by low-caste Indian intellectuals seeking to subvert the authority of brahman nationalists. Chief among these was Phule, who was incensed by the failure, or refusal, of brahman political organisations, led in Maharashtra by Ranade, to address issues of social change and the plight of the lower castes. Phule's writings are aimed specifically at subverting the cultural power of the brahmanical system of belief and legitimation of the caste system, by exposing it as an ideology of oppression and dominance masquerading as a religion. In his 1873 work Slavery Phule distilled the four-varna structure down to two antagonistic groups: brahmans and *shū*dras. The former were Aryan invaders from Iran and the latter the descendents of the enlightened and indigenous D*āsa* population. The former violently subordinated the peace-loving D*āsa*, stealing their land and property before developing an instrument to conceal this appropriation and to perpetuate its effects: the caste system. This was consolidated ideologically through the development of a set of self-serving myths. 'In these treatises' Phule (2002 [1873], 37) wrote, brahmans claimed 'God had deliberately created the shudras for the sole purpose of providing eternal service to the brahmans', and decreed that the shudras would find fulfilment and 'justify their birth' only if they 'diligently serve' brahmans 'and try to please them throughout their lives'. These texts written in a language accessible only to brahmans, who were thereby able to monopolise access to written knowledge:

> If the Creator had made the Vedas for the benefit of all humankind, he would have written them in all the languages of the world, and accordingly, it would

[5] The latter remarks have recently become a matter of controversy since a campaign to remove Gandhi's statue from the University of Ghana highlighted a significant number of his racist comments towards Africans.

> not have occurred that they would only be available in Sanskrit for the direct use and enjoyment of the Brahmans and only indirectly for the rest of humankind by word of mouth. Based on this state of things, there is no way to determine what is true and what is false in the Vedas of the Brahmans as opposed to the truth of the universal God. (Cited in Vendell 2014: 64)

Once extricated from the clutches of brahman ideologues and rendered in the vernacular, the true history of annexation and usurpation concealed within the Hindu myths could be recovered. This required attention be paid to the surviving rituals and oral tales of folk Hinduism (O'Hanlon 1985, 156–160; Mani 2005, 269–70). Embedded in folk culture were the survivals of the collective memory of the pre-Aryan golden age and its loss, personified by the rule of the benevolent King Bali and his ignominious defeat at the hands of the treacherous brahman dwarf Vamana (Phule 2002 [1873], 56–63).[6] Reinterpretation of the myths allowed the deconstruction of the metaphyical foundations of brahman rule, in concepts such as karma, daiva (fate) and prarabdha (predestination) (Deshpande 2002, 7–9; Mani 2005, 268–9).

Marr's Japhetites and Phule's D*āsa* share a common structural position vis-à-vis the Aryans, with the former native to the Mediterranean and the latter to the Indian subcontinent. In 1922, shortly before abandoning the whole notion of families of languages, Marr incorporated 'the languages of Dravidian tribes' in the orbit of Japhetic languages (Thomas 1957, 38–9). Phule's argument that the D*āsa* had been yoked into a subordinate position to the Aryans by means of the caste system encoded in Sanskrit texts paralleled Marr's contention that the Aryan subordination of the Japhetites had led to the formation of stratified noble and demotic languages, such as Armenian, with only the written, Aryan language subjected to sustained study. This idea Marr ultimately developed into the idea of the mixed nature and class character (klassovost′) of all languages.

Phule's contention that the Vedas are historically developed and semantically stratified texts, which should be understood in the light of folk narratives and rituals, finds a strong parallel in Marr's notion of 'semantic palaeontology'. Here texts are made up of layers of meaning that may be 'excavated', ultimately to reveal the collective worldview of primordial, pre-class society. This is an idea that was developed by two of Marr's most talented colleagues, Izrail′ Frank-Kamenetskii and Ol′ga Freidenberg, the former who produced palaeontological readings of the Old and New Testaments in the light of Palestinian folklore (for an overview see Brandist 2011). Phule reads the legend of King Bali (an antithetical peasant double of the orthodox, noble, Vedantic figure of Ram), as a survival from pre-class society, and whose celebration at the Diwali festival anticipates the return of the golden age (O'Hanlon 1985: 160). This is strikingly similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's famous notion of the carnival king, who appears both in folk ritual and in literature, crucial elements of which, as I have argued elsewhere (Brandist 2016), is based on the Marrists' semantic palaeontology. Bakhtin's carnival king harks back to the memory of the undifferentiated social body prior to its dismemberment, and Bakhtin (2008 [1940] 354; 2010 [1965], 377), like Frank-Kamenetskii, links this to the *Purusha Sūkta* in the Rig Veda, the crucial textual authority to which brahmans appealed in order to claim the caste system was divinely ordained. Here the original unity of primeval man was

[6] In the Bhagavata Purana, Vamana is described as an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu.

dismembered into the four castes, the brahman deriving from the head and the *shūdra* from the nether regions.[7]

Phule's appeal to the cultural authority of an undifferentiated, indigenous people was a common move in 'societies formed by militarily powerful incomers' where the invaders control institutions of political and economic power (Turner 1974, 234; see also O'Hanlon 1985, 151). Unsurprisingly it proved attractive to those advocating the cause of social groups on the losing end of the putative Aryan invasion: Phule's D*āsa* and Marr's Japhetites, politically weak peoples who 'represent the undivided land itself against the political system with its internal segmentation and hierarchies of authority' (Turner 1974, 234). In each case it seems the critic of the Indo-European paradigm was not writing history as such but 'rejecting brahmanical history' from a collective subaltern or, using Phule's term, 'shudratishudra perspective' (Deshpande 2002, 7). Their respective polemics need to be understood in this sense, but while Phule was an activist directly countering the political employment of 'Indo-Europeanism' in texts of a literary and polemical nature, Marr was, by the mid 1920s, an influential academic with a significant institutional base engaging with significant linguistic, more broadly philological and archaeological researchers. By the end of the decade he had considerable institutional power and his allies employed that power to support or obstruct research projects and their publications, seeking to maximize their own positions at each stage. The consolidation of the Stalin dictatorship provided the conditions in which this took particularly destructive forms as Marr's suggestion that all languages were converging and merging was consciously linked to Stalin's centralizing nationality policy with the USSR. Opposition to the former was often held to signify opposition to the latter.

Here we approach the issue that neither Marr nor Phule had any great understanding of the realities of imperialism. Marr seems to have believed that Tsarist nationality policy was repressive because ministers accepted erroneous advice from Christian missionaries and European specialists wedded to Indo-Europeanism. Once policy was informed by the perspectives of Russian orientalism he began to argue the 'distinction' (*gran'*) between East and West as an economic and cultural reality, as well as an intellectual construct, was 'melting away', to be replaced by a 'distinction between social layers' (Marr 1926, p. iv). He maintained this position when the Stalin regime resumed the Tsarist extraction of capital from its 'own Orient' in order to compete militarily with hostile imperial powers. Phule similarly believed the British had liberated the sh*ūdras* from some of the most brutal aspects of brahman rule, but had become captives of brahman self-interest. To re-establish their power brahmans were 'using their hereditary deceit… to incite the *shūdras* against the British' (Phule 2002 [1873], 75). Phule thus failed to understand the exploitative nature of British rule, especially its drain on the Indian economy, and the extent to which cooption of the Indian elite was fundamental to its overall project. Only towards the end of his life did he begin to perceive the symbiotic relationship between the imperial power and Brahman authority.

Ambedkar's deconstruction of the Aryan myth

[7] Both Frank-Kamenetskii and Bakhtin were here both influenced by Ernst Cassirer's work on mythical thinking. See, for instance, Bakhtin's extensive notes from Cassirer in Bakhtin (2008, 785–828, especially 799). The parallel Bakhtin (2008 [1940] 354; 2010 [1965], 377) draws between Adam and Purusha seems to derive directly from Frank-Kamenetskii (1938), but this is not credited.

The most famous and influential Indian critic of the caste system and of the ideology Hindu nationalism was undoubtedly Ambedkar. In his 1936 lecture 'The Annihilation of Caste' he refuted the identification of Hinduism with Indian culture thus:

> Hindu Society is a myth. The name Hindu is itself a foreign name. It was given by the Mohammedans to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves. It does not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mohammedan invasion.[8] They did not feel the necessity of a common name because they had no conception of their having constituted a community. Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. Its survival is the be all and end all of its existence. Castes do not even form a federation. A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. (Ambedkar 2016 [1936], 50)

Hindu nationalism was thus seen as the bastard offspring of the Aryan-Semite dichotomy at the basis of what Marr called 'Indo-Europeanism'. The denial of any Hindu society in favour of caste identity parallels Marr's denial of national languages in favour of the class-nature of society. Indeed Marr's 'class' is modeled on the Indian castes as described and explained by European philology - a 'perverse' and 'involuted' form of class in Ambedkar's view (see Rao 2013), rather than the Marxism he consciously simulated. In 1946 Ambedkar published a book Who Were the Shudras? dedicated to Phule, '[t]he Greatest Shudra of Modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule' ([1946], 12). Despite this wholesome endorsement, however, Ambedkar's text aims to refute the thesis of the Aryan invasion that was central to Indo-Europeanism, the brahman ideology, Phule's counter-history and that of Marr alike. Ambedkar took aim specifically at the racial account of Indian history. He systematically unpicked the conflation of race and language both questioning the conclusions drawn by brahman ideologists and Indo-European linguists, beginning with Bopp's 1835 Comparative Grammar:

> The theory does not take account of the possibility that the Aryan race in the physiological sense is one thing and an Aryan race in the philological sense quite different, and that it is perfectly possible that the Aryan race, if there is one, in the physiological sense may have its habitat in one place and that the Aryan race, in the philological sense, in quite a different place. ([1946], 79)

The whole invasion theory rests, for Ambedkar, on the unwarranted assumption 'that the Indo-Germanic people are the purest of the modern representatives of the original Aryan race' with a homeland somewhere in Europe and that a structurally similar language in India must have come from outside ([1946], 79–80). The textual basis for the contention that skin-colour prejudice was cherished by ancient Indians and formed the basis of varna was also interrogated and found wanting. With reference to the

[8] As Jha (2013) shows, the specification of a distinct and unitary Hindu religion actually dates from the time of the British Empire since the terms was used by the Moghuls to refer to all non-Muslim faiths including Buddhism and Jainism.

Zend Avesta,[9] Ambedkar concludes that 'the meaning of the word Varna leaves no doubt that it originally meant a class holding to a particular faith and it had nothing to do with colour or complexion' ([1946], 85). The fundamental distinction at the basis of the caste system was, for Ambedkar, cultic rather than racial, and as a result the *Ārya – Dāsa* division should be viewed as one of class and ideology rather than race or complexion. As for Marr, therefore, Ambedkar sought to replace the division of East and West with one of social layers, evidence for which can be found in the language and culture of each region.

After careful consideration of the evidence Ambedkar concludes that the entire Aryan race theory is an absurdity that survives only because of the confluence of brahman and European colonial interests being taken up and pursued by their own scholars, which can be revealed by outlining the ideological assumptions that persist. Here we have a classic ideology critique seeking to separate factual accuracy and methodological rigour from those of conceptualization and generalization. In a recent article Arvind Sharma (2005, 864) has evaluated Ambedkar's critique against the current state of scholarship on the question and concludes:

> Ambedkar's rejection of the advent of the Aryans into India is still far from being accepted in academic circles, whereas his view that this event was not a cataclysmic 'racial' episode is, by contrast, widely accepted. His general tendency to emphasize the role of cultural over racial factors in the evolution of Hindu social institutions also anticipates more recent developments.

Ambedkar's reference to evidence from the Zend Avesta is held to be particularly innovative and effective in establishing the original meaning of varna, on which so much of the racial theory rests (Sharma 2005, 860–61). Although Ambedkar underestimated the significance of the linguistic evidence that Indo-European came from outside India, he did not seek to argue, in Marrist fashion, that the comparative method itself was simply an expression of the colonial and brahman will to power. Neither did Ambedkar develop anything approaching Marr's ad hoc linguistic procedures to prove the kinship relations he wished to establish.

Conclusion: Reading Marr today

For all the extravagances of Marr's work, considering his critique of Indo-Europeanism alongside those of Phule and Ambedkar shows it cannot simply be dismissed as the 'crackpot' delusions of a paranoid mind that was typical for many decades. As Said was to note decades later, it was 'the extraordinarily rich and celebrated cultural position' of philology that 'endowed orientalism with its most important technical characteristics' (1995 [1978]: p. 131). Marr's anti-Indo-Europeanist counter-formulations included much that is of value for those seeking to develop an effective critique of colonial biases in scholarship, and positioning his approach between the literary and polemical counter-mythology of Phule and the careful but pointed ideology critique of Ambedkar allows this to come to the fore. Perhaps more acutely than anyone else at the time he perceived the persistence of colonial myths and ideological biases within contemporary philology and sought to

[9] The commentaries and translations of Zoroastrian religious texts that were written in the Avestan language.

expose them. He anticipated many of the central aspects of the postcolonial critique of western scholarship, and highlighted the role of ideological factors in shaping both linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. His positive programme of palaeontological semantics included many important features that have proven productive in literary and folklore studies, influencing scholars in the USSR like Frank-Kamenetskii and Freidenberg, whose work is currently being reassessed, and Bakhtin, whose work has exerted a considerable influence on literary and cultural studies more generally.

Marr does remain, however, a powerful example of dubious intellectual practice and scholarly hubris and thus remains a cautionary example for scholars today. This is not for the same reason that his work was long derided, however. Marr's work was no more ideological than that of most of the scholars with whom he engaged – the counter-myth of the disinterested professor who pursues truth without fear or favour was untenable. Rather, it is because Marr simply collapsed the distinction between science and ideology. Indo-Europeanism moreover became a closed discursive circle that one either accepted in a servile fashion or opposed belligerently. His critique of Indo-Europeanism thus anticipates the one-sided notion of a closed Orientalist discourse, and similarly fails to take account of the ways in which Indo-European philology was formed through the dynamic interaction of the works of European colonial scholars with those of the intellectuals of the colonized elite. As Figueira notes, the work of brahman intellectuals exhibits neither 'slavish admiration or xenophobic rejection' of a unitary colonial discourse (2015, 103) but a complex and interactive engagement with the work of colonial scholars. Moreover, such scholars were often not simply agents of the Raj, but both enthusiasts for the cultures they studied and reliant on the work of indigenous pandits (Karttunen 2015). Marr was alert to the danger that intellectuals of the former colonies of the Russian Empire, and Russian intellectuals seeking to retain their influence, would be seduced by Indo-Europeanism into developing their own nationalist philology. It was for this reason that he sought to counter its ideological influence and construct his own alternative that promoted convergence rather than disintegration. Scholarship became power/knowledge and evidence no more than a rhetorical strategy to establish a 'truth' that is to one's advantage.

Marr's critique of Indo-European philology aroused opposition among linguists who were sympathetic to his general project. Most effective was the Marxist oriental linguist Evgenii Polivanov who, in essence, insisted that issues of methodological rigor and factual accuracy in establishing matters such as the kinship of languages needed to be distinguished from those of interpretation, generalization or conceptualization (Polivanov 1991 [1929]; Leont′ev 1983, 31–45). Polivanov conceded that the formal method in linguistics was excessively abstract and narrow, cutting language off from its wider social conditions and so led towards a concern with dead over living languages. He also acknowledged that linguists' selective focus on Indo-European languages was ideological and related to colonialism, and their mechanical application of categories designed to describe European languages to very different non-European languages such as Chinese was evidence of Eurocentrism. Nevertheless, this did not, in Polivanov's view, require the wholesale rejection of the entire technical apparatus developed by comparative linguistics, and ultimately Marr was obliged to invent his own ad hoc methods of addressing the same issues as his opponents, which were, by and large, unconvincing and sometimes simply bizarre. Most notorious was Marr's contention that all words in all languages could be broken

down into combinations of the four primordial and totemic phonemes sal, ber, ion and rosh. Such extravagances, along with the destructive and clearly unethical conduct of Marr's opportunist supporters undoubtedly contributed to the wholesale and offhand dismissal of Marr's work, and that of many of his most talented colleagues, for decades following Stalin's denunciation of Marr's New Theory. Marr's dichotomy of a bourgeois Indo-European discourse versus his New Theory was replaced by one of bourgeois versus Soviet oriental studies (vostokovedenie) as the Cold War dawned (Anon 1949), the often repeated characterization of the former exerting a strong, if indirect, influence on Said's Orientalism.[10]

While the case of Marr alerts us to the value of genealogical criticism, it particularly highlights its limitations, especially when viewed against some of the very similar ideas developed by lower-caste critics of 'Indo-Europeanism'. Greater attention is needed to the specific modes of dialogic interaction between interlocutors positioned within institutions and wider structures of power than is typical of much contemporary theory. Moreover, the need to assess the relevance and effectiveness of appeals to statutory as opposed to specifically scientific authority in different fields of enquiry and at specific historical junctures is of fundamental importance. Finally the socio-economic realities of colonialism, imperialism and capital accumulation operating within and between societies being discussed and within which analysis is taking place cannot be neglected. Only under these conditions can the value of the work of a complex and institutionally embedded figure like Marr be accurately assessed, and can we learn from his failures as well as successes.

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[10] The most direct link with Said's book is via Abdel-Malek (1963), where the Soviet characterization of orientalism is referenced several times (Tolz 2006, 127). However, this merely specifies a much broader influence via the many intellectuals of anticolonial movements educated in the USSR.

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